Some Remarks on the Plücker Relations

Michael G. Eastwood and Peter W. Michor

1. The Plücker relations

Let V denote a finite-dimensional vector space. An s-vector $P \in \Lambda^s V$ is called *decomposable* or *simple* if it can be written in the form

$$P = u \wedge v \wedge \cdots \wedge w \quad \text{for } u, v, \ldots, w \in V.$$

We shall use in the following both Penrose's abstract index notation and exterior calculus with the conventions of [3].

Theorem 1. *Let $P \in \Lambda^s V$ be an s-vector. Then P is decomposable if and only if one of the following conditions holds:*

1. $i(\Phi)P \wedge P = 0$ *for all* $\Phi \in \Lambda^{s-1}V^*$. *In index notation* $P_{[abc\cdots d}P_{e]fg\cdots h} = 0$.
2. $i(i_P\Psi)P = 0$ *for all* $\Psi \in \Lambda^{s+1}V^*$.
3. $i_{\alpha_1\wedge\cdots\wedge\alpha_{s-k}}P$ *is decomposable for all* $\alpha_i \in V^*$, *for any fixed* $k \geq 2$.
4. $i(\Psi)P \wedge P = 0$ *for all* $\Psi \in \Lambda^{s-2}V^*$ *In index notation* $P_{[abc\cdots d}P_{ef]g\cdots h} = 0$.
5. $i(i_P\Psi)P = 0$ *for all* $\Psi \in \Lambda^{s+2}V^*$.

Proof. (1) These are the well known classical Plücker relations. For completeness' sake we include a proof. Let $P \in \Lambda^n V$ and consider the induced linear mapping $\sharp_P : \Lambda^{s-1}V^* \to V$. Its image, W, is contained in each linear subspace U of V with $P \in \Lambda^s U$. Thus W is the minimal subspace with this property. P is decomposable if and only if $\dim W = s$, and this is the case if and only if $w \wedge P = 0$ for each $w \in W$. But $i_\Phi P$ for $\phi \in \Lambda^{s-1}V^*$ is the typical element in W.

(2) This well known variant of the Plücker relations follows by duality (see [4]):

$$\begin{aligned}\langle P \wedge i(\Phi)P, \Psi\rangle &= \langle i(\Phi)P, i_P\Psi\rangle = \langle P, \Phi \wedge i_P\Psi\rangle = \\ &= (-1)^{(s-1)}\langle P, i_P\Psi \wedge \Phi\rangle = (-1)^{(s-1)}\langle i(i_P\Psi)P, \Phi\rangle.\end{aligned}$$

(3) This is due to [6]. There it is proved using exterior algebra. Apparently, this result is included in formula (4), page 116 of [7].

(4) Another proof using representation theory will be given below. Here we prove it by induction on s. Let $s = 3$. Suppose that $i_\alpha P \wedge P = 0$ for all $\alpha \in V^*$. Then for all $\beta \in V^*$ we have $0 = i_\beta(i_\alpha P \wedge P) = i_{\alpha\wedge\beta}P \wedge P + i_\alpha P \wedge i_\beta P$. Interchange α and β in the last expression and add it to the original, then we get $0 = 2i_\alpha P \wedge i_\beta P$ and in turn $i_{\alpha\wedge\beta}P \wedge P = 0$ for all α and β, which are the original Plücker relations, so P is decomposable. Now the induction step. Suppose that $P \in \Lambda^s V$ and that $i_{\alpha_1\wedge\cdots\wedge\alpha_{s-2}}P \wedge P = 0$ for all $\alpha_i \in V^*$. Then we have

$$0 = i_{\alpha_1}(i_{\alpha_1\wedge\cdots\wedge\alpha_{s-2}}P \wedge P) = i_{\alpha_1\wedge\cdots\wedge\alpha_{s-2}}P \wedge i_{\alpha_1}P = i_{\alpha_2\wedge\cdots\wedge\alpha_{s-2}}(i_{\alpha_1}P) \wedge (i_{\alpha_1}P)$$

MGE was supported as a Senior Research Fellow of the Australian Research Council. PWM was supported by 'Fonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung, Projekt P 10037 PHY'. The authors would also like to thank the organizers of the Nineteenth Winter School on Geometry and Physics held in Srní, the Czech Republic, in January 1999, where discussions concerning this article were initiated.
This paper is in final form and no version of it will be submitted for publication elsewhere.

for all α_i, so that by induction we may conclude that $i_{\alpha_1} P$ is decomposable for all α_1, and then by (3) P is decomposable.

(5) Again this follows by duality. $\square$

Let us note that the following result (Lemma 1 in [2]), a version of the 'three plane lemma' also implies (3):

Let $\{P_i : i \in I\}$ be a family of decomposable non-zero k-vectors in V such that each $P_i + P_j$ is again decomposable. Then

(a) either the linear span W of the linear subspaces $W(P_i) = \mathrm{Im}(\sharp_{P_i})$ is at most $(k+1)$-dimensional
(b) or the intersection $\bigcap_{i \in I} W(P_i)$ is at least $(k-1)$-dimensional.

Finally note that (1) and (4) are both invariant under $\mathrm{GL}(V)$. In the next section we shall decompose (1) into its irreducible components in this representation.

If $\dim V$ is high enough in comparison with s, then (4) seemingly comprises less equations.

2. Representation theory

In order efficiently to analyse (1) and (4) it is necessary to take a small excursion through representation theory. An extensive discussion of Young tableau may be found in [1]. Here we shall just need

$$Y^{s,t} \equiv \; s\left\{ \begin{array}{|c|c|} \hline & \\ \hline \vdots & \vdots \\ \hline & \\ \hline \vdots \\ \cline{1-1} \\ \cline{1-1} \end{array} \right. \quad \left.\begin{array}{c} \\ \\ \\ \end{array}\right\} t$$

regarded as irreducible representations of $\mathrm{GL}(V)$. Then, as special cases of the Littlewood-Richardson rules, we have

$$\begin{aligned}
\Lambda^s V \otimes \Lambda^s V &= Y^{s,s} \oplus Y^{s+1,s-1} \oplus Y^{s+2,s-2} \oplus Y^{s+3,s-3} \oplus \cdots \oplus Y^{2s,0} \\
\Lambda^{s+1} \otimes \Lambda^{s-1} V &= Y^{s+1,s-1} \oplus Y^{s+2,s-2} \oplus Y^{s+3,s-3} \oplus \cdots \oplus Y^{2s,0} \\
\Lambda^{s+2} \otimes \Lambda^{s-2} V &= Y^{s+2,s-2} \oplus Y^{s+3,s-3} \oplus \cdots \oplus Y^{2s,0}
\end{aligned}$$

and from the first two of these (1) says that $P \otimes P \in Y^{s,s}$. In fact,

$$(\star\star) \qquad \begin{aligned}
\Lambda^s V \odot \Lambda^s V &= Y^{s,s} \oplus Y^{s+2,s-2} \oplus \cdots \\
\Lambda^s V \wedge \Lambda^s V &= Y^{s+1,s-1} \oplus Y^{s+3,s-3} \oplus \cdots
\end{aligned}$$

so we can also see the equivalence of (1) and (4) without any calculation. Having decomposed $\Lambda^s V \odot \Lambda^s V$ into irreducibles, it behoves one to investigate the consequences of having each irreducible component of $P \otimes P$ vanish separately. The first of these gives us another improvement on the classical Plücker relations:

Theorem 2. *An s-form P is simple if and only if the component of $P \otimes P$ in $Y^{s+2,s-2}$ vanishes.*

Proof. The representation $Y^{s+2,s-2}$ may be realised as those tensors
$$T_{a_1b_1a_2b_2\ldots a_{s-2}b_{s-2}cdef}$$
which are symmetric in the pairs a_jb_j for $j=1,2,\ldots s-2$, skew in $cdef$, and have the property that symmetrising over any three indices gives zero. The corresponding Young projection of
$$P_{a_1a_2\ldots a_{s-2}cd}P_{b_1b_2\ldots b_{s-2}ef}$$
is obtained by skewing over $cdef$ and symmetrising over each of the pairs a_jb_j for $j=1,2,\ldots,s-2$. Its vanishing, therefore, is equivalent to the vanishing of
$$Q_{[cd}Q_{ef]} \quad \text{where } Q_{cd}=\alpha^{a_1}\beta^{a_2}\cdots\gamma^{a_{s-2}}P_{a_1a_2\ldots a_{s-2}cd}$$
for all $\alpha^a,\beta^a,\ldots,\gamma^a\in V^*$. According to (4), this means that Q_{cd} is simple. Therefore, the theorem is equivalent to criterion (3) of Theorem 1. □

Notice that this generally cuts down further the number of equations needed to characterise the simple s-vectors. The simplest instance of this is for 4-forms: P is simple if and only if
$$P_{[abcd}P_{ef]gh}=P_{[abcd}P_{efgh]}.$$
Written in this way, it is slightly surprising that one can deduce the vanishing of each side of this equation separately. Theorem 2 is optimal in the sense that the vanishing of any other component or components in the irreducible decomposition $(\star\star)$ of $P\otimes P$ is either insufficient to force simplicity or causes P to vanish. In the case of four-forms, for example,
$$P_{[abcd}P_{efgh]}=0$$
if $P=v\wedge Q$ for some vector v and three-form Q. On the other hand, if the $Y^{4,4}$ component of $P\otimes P$ vanishes, then arguing as in the proof of Theorem 2 shows that $P=0$.

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P. W. Michor: Institut für Mathematik, Universität Wien, Strudlhofgasse 4, A-1090 Wien, Austria, *and*: Erwin Schrödinger Institute, Boltzmanngasse 9, A-1090, Wien, Austria.
E-mail: michor@esi.ac.at

M. Eastwood: Dept. Pure Math., Univ. of Adelaide, Adelaide, SA 5005, Australia.
E-mail: meastwoo@maths.adelaide.edu.au